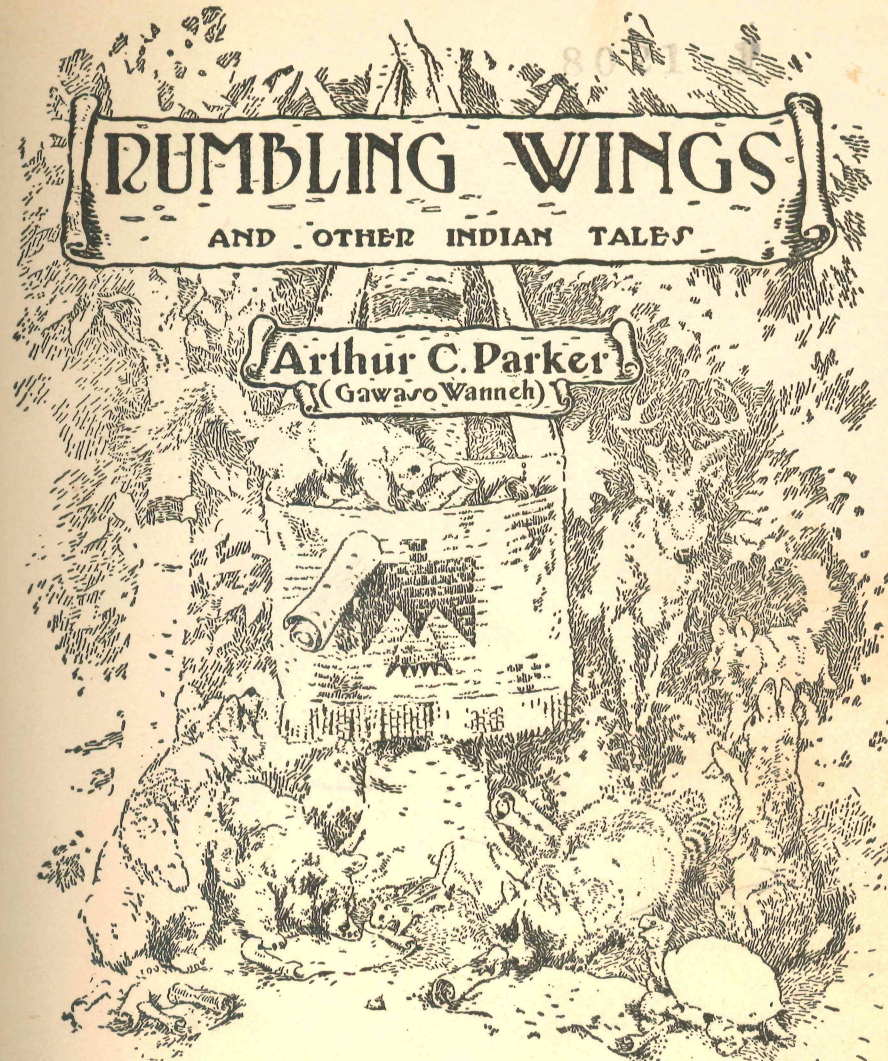




RUMBLING WINGS BEGAN HIS TALE



Illustrated by
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And when the Wizards had washed their faces the honey came off and the flies went away.

"We feel so much better now," both said.

"Follow me on to O-was-co," commanded Skunny Wundy, "and from there we march on to Onagee."

And so it was that the reformed Wizards followed the young Chief back over the trail to his home, and having lost all their magic, they spent their lives forever after in swatting the wicked flies that bit honest folk in the bark lodges of the town of Onagee in the land of Nunda Waga.

So that is why Skunny Wundy always wore upon his neck a shell gorget upon which was etched the figure of a web with a spider in it. Na-hoh!

AND THAT NIGHT—

When Skunny Wundy had returned in safety to his happy hearth, Ruddy Rux ran out of the lodge of the Bear Clansmen to greet him.

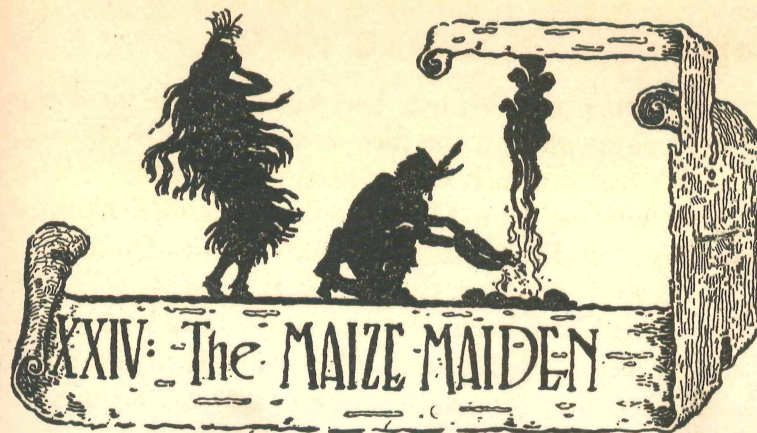
"I see that you brought two captives," said he.

"Yes, watch them eat. One might think they were hungry."

Just as he said that, one of the Wizards dropped a corncake in the fire. Down he stooped to recover it, and burnt his hand so badly that he bellowed like a bull moose when it is sick.

"Why didn't he let the cake burn up?" asked Ruddy Rux, amazed at the trouble the prisoner had taken to take the cake out of the fire.

"Tell him, Uncle," replied Skunny Wundy, looking at old Rumbling Wings, and so the ancient storyteller wove the sacred tale of "The Maize Maiden."



"Mock not the gifts of Ra-wen-io, lest they fly away like pigeons at autumn." Rumbling Wings.

IN OLDEN days, before our world knew the wisdom of Ha-yo-went-ha, there was a happy village known as Dyut-ti-hak-ton. It stood in a vast clearing on the banks of a winding river that flowed down to the Jen-ne-see.

In that village of tenscore long lodges lived a family of the Bear Clan, and there were two youths of great promise therein, Black Lynx, the elder, and Corn Tassel, the younger. The elder was the hunter, and the younger helped his mother in the fields, for he had not yet attained the hunter rank, being a playful youth who loved the game of lacrosse. Black Lynx, the elder, was sullen and cruel, and he delighted more in the torture of the animals he trapped than he did in the food that they meant to the clan.

Corn Tassel did not enjoy the cruelties of his brother, and often protested, at which Black Lynx would say, "If I cannot have sport with my victims

I will have it with you—take your choice.” And once when he had said this he grabbed Corn Tassel by the neck and thrust sharp thorns through his cheeks, laughing uproariously as the blood trickled down his chin.

“Now I know how Joey Coon and Little Bear feel,” said Corn Tassel. “You hurt my friends, and now I know just what they think of you.”

Black Lynx thereupon kicked his brother, shouting, “Begone, you servant of women. Go back to your fields and straighten up the stalks I have knocked over with my war club. If I am to be a great warrior I must learn how to torture my enemies. But you—you will become a woman and learn to make bread. Ho-hoh!”

Corn Tassel walked slowly to his cornfield, thinking many things, and when he saw the field, he found the stalks flat on the ground where Black Lynx had broken the green growing plants. Gently he bound up the bruised things and put poles in the middle of each hill for supports.

There was one plant which seemed more beautiful than all the others, for its plumes were brighter, its leaves broader, and its budding ears gave greater promise of grain. This plant was broken and trampled, and where its skin had been torn, red blood flowed out onto the ground. Corn Tassel, believing this to be the “queen plant” of the field, gave it great care, but in spite of all his nursing it wilted and died. Black Lynx had killed it with his cruelty.

Midsummer came, and the village was restless. A long wail came from one of the long lodges, and soon

there was another cry. Corn Tassel hurried from the grove of hickories where he had a sheltering bower and ran to the village square. One by one he saw the women of the lodges wend their way to the green and there cluster about each other with mournful cries. Corn Tassel listened intently and discovered that famine had stricken his people. All food was gone, and the hunters had brought in no game for two moons.

This mournful news of the women sent runners speeding through the village with cries, summoning all the inhabitants to the council lodge. The chiefs assembled, and the people came in droves, all crying for food.

Long did the chiefs debate why the corn would not grow and why the game had departed, but there was no conclusion. None could answer. Thereupon the chiefs ordered the women to dig roots and to peel trees for edible bark. Hoping against hope that the crops would grow and the game would become plentiful, the people had waited until their larders were empty, and now grim starvation stared them in the face, making it necessary for them to root like bears for even tough tubers.

Corn Tassel thought much about the troubles of his people, and every morning before seeking out places where grew the starchy roots of pond lilies and cat-tails, he would go to the hilltop and talk to the sun, lifting up his hands and crying out, “O great brother of life, if it be your will to give us food, your friends of the earth will be grateful.”

The sun would loom red and hot and, as if in answer, send down a blistering heat that burned the

plants and dried up the water. Nevertheless, Corn Tassel would pray again each morning, for he had great faith in the wisdom of the All-Wise.

He now fell to comforting the people in their distress, saying, "Help is coming. Many times other people have suffered from hunger, but food always came; therefore, let us not despair. Who knows that we may not have offended the Life Givers, and must suffer until we make amends?"

Black Lynx always laughed at Corn Tassel when he so spoke to the people, and in derision would cry, "The young brother, being so wise, makes himself appear like unto a Hodiont at the ceremonies. Who gave this youth the right to instruct his elders and speak of offended Live Givers? Who, I would like to know! Perhaps it is he who is guilty and needs torture to bring back our food!"

Once when Black Lynx had so spoken, he flung Corn Tassel into the lodge fire and burned him in the embers. "Thus do I punish he who had brought famine!" he exclaimed.

Corn Tassel never murmured at his burns or his bruises, but kept a cheerful heart. Little did he eat, for there were small children and aged bodies that needed strong food. His eyes grew bright and sunken, his cheeks pale, and his hands very thin. He sought his woodland retreat and slept much, even by day, dreaming dreams and seeing visions of better times.

The night was hot and not a breeze stirred when Corn Tassel awakened, for he plainly heard the sound of pattering footsteps, as if upon an unseen path of beaten clay. He gazed upward through the smoke hole

of his bower and saw in the clouds above him the shadowy form of a maiden bearing a basket of corn. He listened and heard her footsteps again; then did he know that his prayer would be answered.

Day dawned hot and breathless, and though he was weak, Corn Tassel went from house to house, saying, "I have good news: the footsteps of she-who-brings-food are heard in the clouds."

The people looked at him with wondering eyes, for he was very pale and wilted. Black Lynx laughed in derision and again flung Corn Tassel into the fire, shouting, "Away with the lying dreamer who conjures false visions to drive good people mad!" And yet, there were good people who believed Corn Tassel told the truth.

Day by day the sound of pattering footsteps became plainer to Corn Tassel, and the invisible path became faintly luminous at night, whereupon the youth slept by day and gazed up at the stars through the darkness of night.

It was an occasion when there was no moon that Corn Tassel plainly saw the bright path against the deep blue sky, and upon the path he beheld a maiden of rare beauty. Her garments were long and flowing, her skirts rippled in long streamers, like the leaves of the corn plant. Corn Tassel could hear the faint rustling sound as she walked. At dawning the maiden came nearer, until Corn Tassel saw the silvery path descend like a broad beam of light to his own feet. He sprang up from the log where he sat, but the path moved wherever he moved. Thus he walked slowly in the pale light of dawn until he came to the withered

cornfield. Above him just under the clouds was the maiden with her basket of food.

On rolled the sun, and as it touched the hills of the morning, the maiden ran down the gleaming path and stood in the midst of the field.

"I have come," she whispered, with a voice like the morning zephyrs, "I have come to the door of your lodge with bread."

Corn Tassel could say nothing, but walked before the maiden to the door of his lodge, and she followed.

He stood in the doorway, and looking into the great hall of bark and blackened poles, he shouted, "Help has come, awaken, awaken! The maiden is here, even as I told!"

Corn Tassel's mother arose and came to the door, at which the maiden spoke. "Greetings, my mother," she said. "My own mother who bore me has sent me hither with bread for your son. If he eats it he shall become my plighted husband. If this comes to pass, then all shall remove the covers of their corn barrels that they may be filled."

Soon the people began to cluster about the lodge of the Bears where Corn Tassel and the shining maiden stood side by side. The sun began to shimmer in its old evil way over the scorched land, and it was day. Corn Tassel took the bread from the maiden and ate it, thereby pledging his heart to hers.

Scenting food, the people, with a dullness born of their empty stomachs, cried out that they might be filled, but the maiden replied, "Return to your lodges, remove the covers from your corn barrels, then cover your heads and wait."



AT DAWNING THE MAIDEN CAME NEARER

Black Lynx cried out that they should not obey, for was it not told that when the geese covered their heads the fox had his fill of them? The maiden listened but merely answered, "Let those who would eat do as I say, and by listening you will hear the corn rain into your bins. When the sound ceases, you may look—then may you eat."

With impatient growls the people obeyed, and when all had covered, corn began to patter into the uncovered barrels until every vessel was filled to the brim, but not a kernel spilled over.

Happy now were the hearts of the people as the women prepared many corn dishes—hominy and samp, white meal bread and parched cakes. Then they burst into song and praised the Giver of All for his goodness, and all sang in thanksgiving save Black Lynx, who grumbled that he wanted fish.

"Then repair to the creek and cast in your net," whispered the maiden. "Sink it in and draw: fish will be plenty."

When Black Lynx scoffed that the creek was dry and that all the fishes had perished, Corn Tassel went and drew out many baskets of fish—even enough for the whole village.

Black Lynx grabbed and ate the largest and best, throwing his corn bread into the fire with an evil word of disdain, but of the fish he ate heads and bones, casting out only the scales. Then he laughed as he upturned the bowls of meal and kicked them into the fire.

"Oh, cast not your bread into the fire," cried the maiden as she clutched at her breast, tears springing

into her eyes. But the greedy brother only growled as he gnawed at more fish.

When the next morning came Corn Tassel took his bow and went into the forest for deer. While he was absent Black Lynx began to torment the maiden. "Bold woman, you!" exclaimed he. "Who are you to come among strangers begging a man? Were there no men in your own country who would have you? Whence came you, anyway? Where did you get such a strange dress? Who ever saw buckskins of green? I never saw a woman with plumes in her hair like a warrior. Strange woman, who welcomed you? The corn that you brought but sickens the people. If you are such a magician, why not make it rain meat? As for your corn, bah—I cast it into the fire—it is tasteless!"

The maiden endured all this scorn, but when the meal was again thrown into the fire she screamed and threw out her hands, but as it was quickly scorched she wept bitterly.

When Corn Tassel returned he found the maiden in tears. She came to him with outstretched hands and trembling. "Your older brother has ruined my coming," she said. "O my plighted husband, in your brother's action I see the outspoken hatred of your people. I must depart or I shall die. I cannot remain. Soon again my feet will be heard upon the sky road and I shall see you no more."

A group of jealous women who had strained their ears to listen cried out, "Who cares whether you come or go? Our bins are full to overflowing, the river teems

with fish, and game swarms the forest. Who bids you stay? None of us."

"I wish that this had not happened," sighed Corn Tassel. "There are those who with me know of your gracious gift and your kindness. I would not have you die, but live, yet I would that you might stay."

"I cannot," said the maiden.

The day deepened into twilight, and then came the darkness. There was no moon. A strange sound was heard everywhere throughout the village of Dyut-ti-hak-ton, and it was as if corn were being scooped out of bins and thrown into the air.

Morning came, and the women arose to get corn for the midday meal, but there was no corn. As they looked for the shining maiden, many repented that they had spoken so boldly, but she had gone.

"If you listen," spoke Corn Tassel, "you will hear her retreating footsteps on the path in the sky."

"Nonsense," cried Black Lynx. "There is no path in the sky. There is a sky, there is earth, and there is the land beneath, and in all is only death. All is deceit; your dreams deceive you, and that a maiden was here is but a dream that grew from your aching gullets."

"She was here, I know," asserted Corn Tassel, heavy hearted. "We ate of her food, and even now you stand upon the burned mush that you cast into the fire. That was no dream, but an evil deed."

Days went by and there was no food. Famine again gripped the stricken villagers, and once more Corn Tassel was taunted by his brother with bringing all this disaster.

Then did Corn Tassel say, "I, too, shall depart, for it is plain to see that you will not have me among you. I go to the maiden whom I have chosen as a wife. Your carelessness and ingratitude have sent her away, but I shall find her and save you that you may live to be grateful in plenty."

That night Corn Tassel started on his journey, and he had not gone far into the darkness before he knew that he was walking in the air. He looked before him and saw a faintly luminous path, and then he knew that his journey was onward to the land from whence the maiden came.

For the duration of a moon he traveled thus, until, at length, he came to a fair land far to the south, where there were many fields amid many great mounds. Here he sought the maiden, but ever the answer would be, "Upon the middle mound the maize maiden stands, and she lodges there with her mother."

Long did Corn Tassel seek the maiden, and as he sought, his body bloomed with the yellow dust of the corn. Then came the winds, and they led him gently to the middle mound, where he found people dressed in green. Mounds stood on every hand, and around the mounds were waving fields and happy hamlets, yet the middle mound loomed high, and he knew it when he cast his eyes upon it. It was tall and shapely, and its sides were covered with rows of tall corn, far more luxuriant than all the other fields he had seen.

Walking up the wide path, Corn Tassel escaped two great worms that were tied there with heavy thongs, and he quickly passed a great raven that,

with feet tied, croaked out ill luck. On the top of the mound was a handsome white lodge, with vines clamoring over it and bearing gourds of many kinds and shapes. Corn Tassel walked straight to the vine-clad door and there saw the maiden, busy with her task of weaving a mat of husks.

"I have come for you," he exclaimed. "My heart has been sad without you, and my country suffers with famine. Will you come?"

"O my husband," cried the maiden, "rather will you abide with me here to learn the ways of my people. Then you may teach me the ways of your people, for they are very strange."

"I will abide with you," he said, "but my people starve."

"They starve because they burn my flesh," replied the maid. "See my cheek and my breasts where the scars scarcely have healed. This your brother did when he cast the meal into the fire."

"How could that be?" asked Corn Tassel, his eyes large with wonder.

"Because," she answered, "I am the Maize Maiden. The meal of the corn is my flesh, the milk is my blood. All of the plant is useful to man, even the husks and the stalk. When the maize plant is hurt, I am hurt, and my father and mother will not let me stay."

"I would see your mother," said Corn Tassel.

"You have seen her," answered the maiden. "My mother is Yo-an-dja, the Earth; my father is En-dey-ka, the Sun."

For many moons Corn Tassel lived in the land of

the mounds of maize, learning all the lore, the songs, the dances, and the ways of the people. Then, when he had completed his learning, his wife took his hand and they went back over the gleaming path that arched through the stars and down to the land of the people of Dyut-ti-hak-ton.

Long before they arrived, good people heard the sound of their feet on the path and waited their coming. A morning came and with it the Maize Woman with her husband Corn Tassel. The earth smiled in glistening dew, and the sun shone kindly upon it. The people came out to see the two who had come, and all received them with songs of thanksgiving, all save Black Lynx.

"Evil dreams again appear," screamed Black Lynx. "Our people are doomed, for they who devour meal do not kill like those who hunt and drink blood." And so saying he grasped his club and swung it high in the air over the head of his brother and the Maize Woman. He took a threatening step forward and then lunged at them, but the earth gave way with a rumbling sound. There was a crack yawning wide, and into it Black Lynx fell with a scream and was swallowed up.

"I have returned," said the Maize Woman. "Corn Tassel is my husband, and he brings you new ceremonies that will teach you how to make the earth fruitful. But most effective of all is a thankful heart that is grateful for all Earth and Sun give to mankind."

"Most welcome, shining ones," cried the chiefs of the people. "Abide with us forever."

Thus did famine depart, and corn once more rained down into empty bins, so that soon all the people grew strong. Ever since, when the corn is green, the faithful hold dances of joy and sing thanksgiving songs to the All Wise One, and they who serve him, Earth and Sun. And wisdom has taught that the great gifts must not be destroyed, for it is said by the sages of old, "Mock not the gifts of Ra-wen-io, lest they fly away like pigeons at autumn."